

[Letter from Woody Guthrie to Alan Lomax, February 15, 1941]

A-18

Radio Sta. KFVD 338 South Western Av e., Los Angeles, Calif.

Howdy Alan,

How's Javella? Hope she's up and rolling as high wide and handsome as that old Susquehannah River ever did. Tell her hello for all of us; and who is helping you keep house these days, would you be interested in a good, honest, kindhearted outlaw if I was to run onto one? Anyway we have talked about the Tower and all of you and wished that we had us a nice little house and garden and a little patch of timber right square up on top of some solid rock about 1500 foot high with the wind blowing about 75 miles an hour all of the time.

Give our regards to the cast in New York. Hope they are all in good circumstances with a sponsor that likes them good as we do and one that believes in freedom on speaking. Will write Nick and all a letter before long. I couldn't see to save my neck any immediate prospect of a commercial there. The fifteen minutes was a little packed. The elevator run too straight up and straight down and the studio had too many radioactivites in it, and so I ducked off down across the southern states to get a first hand look at what's going on, and lit here in L.A. to get my old program back where I can know dam good and well I aint a gonna get no money and no sponsor and can rest with that out of my head. Money sometimes takes on the appearance of a something that's used to put monkeys in your head.

My program starts this coming Monday, three or four days. By the time you get this letter I'll be wheeling and a dealing. What can we do to work this thing together? What help can

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I be to your project in the Library? I aim to deal first hand in folk lore and to accumulate several thousand good letters containing tales and stories of all kinds and colors, and to collect songs that reflect the real life of just natural people, and if you can give me any sanction from your office it would help. Take a hunk of that Library of Congress stationary and write me a letter to the effect that the Library is interested in anything I might collect, and say anything you want to about me that will tell a prospective sponsor just what we done in Washington and also on CBS, etc. This will give me an introduction to sponsors at least.

I aim to take the platform now to try my best to teach folks songs, and since my trip back in your country I figure I know a little more than I did before. I run onto my Oklahoma Yodeling Cowboy cousin, Leon Guthrie, and he's been following rodeos up through the northwestern states for a couple of years and has got a hell of a big bunch of tales up his sleeve. He's got a house trailer. Wants us to build one for our family and take off on the rodeo trails. I might do a little of that, but will have to have a flock of fifteen minute programs recorded and left at the station to be played when we're on the road. Figure to see and hear lots of things both ways, by keeping still and rambling.

We got us a cabin in a two by four tourist court. Aricraft boom here make it hard to get shelter. Wont take kids hardly a tall. We househunted 3 days with no luck. Same old tale, How many kids? Sorry the owner's away. No kids. Awful sorry. The god dam silly way they look at you like you'd ought to take your kids off sommwhere and tie a grinding stone around their neck and throw them in the river — and then you could pay twice as much as you ought to and rent you a house. I'm a adult and I dont need their bastardly old houses, but my kids do and it is one hell of a thing. You run onto hundreds of folks that feels this same way. Some kind of houses has got to be built for families with kids — the more kids, the bigger bargain you would get.

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Have made a few bookings out here already, the APM, People's World Forum, etc., and they are as worked up over the songs of the east coast as they are of their own west coast. It is a good thing to see a feeling so solid from coast to coast and to see the songs of the midwest or the old broke down south as welcome in Seattle, San Diego, Boston, or Houston —; and that is sign that folks are just plain folks everywhere you go, all has been hit hard, went through several political cyclones, been sold out so often that they feel like they've got pimps....the thought is about the same everywhere, because the song on one side of the map is the same on the other side — and when newspapers and radios and records wont carry these songs, nor help these people out, it is good to see the song spread anyhow, like their war scare, only bigger — just like on any other subject, folks has got something to say about it; they might not let on around high society ginks, but the people has got just a plenty to say about every little thing that's said and done that's a leading us down this lonesome road to the war — and of course you know how folks always has pretended to be dumb or blank in the presence of officers of the law that they dont trust or like. With every invention of modern times turned against them, the people sing their song just the same as they ever did. Everywhere you go they tell you they dont believe what you hear on your radio. They point and smile and listen the same as they play cards or pool or checkers, just to have something to pass the time away — as far as soaking up all of this war scare and bloody talk and hooray stuff —, they've had hard luck enough to wake them up and put them away above that stuff — that comes from great big overgrown rich folks. They control everything that's said and done on every single radio. (Everything but the feelings of the people). We'll have some real honest to goodness singing and playing on the air waves some of these days, when the real peoples songs and programs can be broadcasted instead of what we have got now.

Los Angeles and southern California is thickly settled. This little station covers a strip about 100 miles in each direction. It is full of people that work and talk a working man's lingo, no matter what tongue or color; so I thought, beings our program on WABC was overloaded, beings it only come on 3 times a week, beings it didn't ever get released onto a nationwide

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chain, that it might be better for me to step off out here and take a swing at her six times a week, and cover this country that's so newly settled and where there's a possible chance for alot of new things to get started.

My best regards to all of the gang on Back Where I Come From. Tell them all to set their self down and write me a big long letter.

Take it easy but take it,

Woody Guthrie

Woody 2-15-41